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## BULU KNOWLEDGE OF THE GORILLA AND CHIMPANZEE

BY ALBERT ERNEST JENKS

THE following facts are from data gathered at my request by Mr Francis B. Guthrie, recently of Kolodorf, Kamerun province, German West Africa. Mr Guthrie says it is almost impossible for the white man in Kamerun, though in the center of the gorilla's geographic range, to have intimate knowledge of that animal. He has known of only one white man who has killed a gorilla there in five years.

The facts here presented were obtained from members of the Bulu tribe whom Mr Guthrie has known intimately for some years, and with whose language he is familiar. They were verified by other natives than the original informants; but Mr Guthrie calls attention to the Bulu's credulity and his decided tendency to exaggerate.

### THE GORILLA

The gorillas of Kamerun live in small companies, scarcely to be called families, except in the younger days of the band when only two, three, or four individuals are found together. A company seldom comprises more than twelve members, and is said never to exceed fifteen or sixteen. The smaller companies consist of one male with his one, two, or three wives, and some small children. A company of six or seven members would probably have two adult males. As the younger members grow up they take, or rather keep, their places in the company. When the old male becomes cross, or possibly, it may be, too infirm to travel with the company, he goes off by himself and spends the rest of his life without companionship. As to whether this isolation is from individual choice, or whether the females refuse to have more to do with the old male, or whether the young males band together and force his retirement, the natives do not agree. "But," says Mr Guthrie, "we know that

isolation of the old males prevails among the drills, chimpanzees, monkeys, wild hogs, and elephants in the African jungles." The natives have absolutely no knowledge of the genesis of new families or companies.

The female bears only one child at a birth, and apparently prepares no special bed in anticipation. Until the child is strong enough to travel the mother carries it with her much of the time, clasping her arm around it. She picks the child up by one arm, often cradling it in her two arms as the human mother does her child. The natives note in this conduct one of the gorilla's greatest likenesses to man.

The gorilla seldom, if ever, sleeps two successive nights in the same place. In the virgin forest he commonly makes a "bed" on the ground. This consists of a few poles, usually dead wood laid side by side. Sometimes the bed is made in a low branch of a leafy tree. Apparently each gorilla sleeps by himself, and the beds are made some little distance apart. When, as is very common, the night is spent in old gardens, the tall reeds are broken down and the gorilla sleeps on a bed of leaves from two to four feet from the ground. The gorilla goes to bed late and rises early.

The foraging is also done independently as a rule, although it is frequently claimed and more or less generally believed by the Bulu that the "old man" sometimes has his food brought to him, as, for instance, when the gorillas are eating the fruit of a tall tree. They find most of their food very early in the morning or late in the day. They also commonly feed on moonlight nights. No record is found that they store food. Their food consists of many kinds of forest fruits, from shrubs and trees, and also of such bananas, plantains and sugar cane as they can secure from the more or less deserted "old" gardens. These gardens are their common haunts. They stay for days, weeks, or even months in one section, and then suddenly change locality. They usually return at the next season; and thus are seasonal migrants.

The gorilla usually walks upright as he travels and feeds on the ground, and he spends very little time in the trees—probably none, except for food or an occasional sleep. Gorillas are commonly

very timid and flee at man's approach, but the Bulu natives fear them greatly, and with some reason, for when a large male attacks a man, that man must be strong and crafty to come out alive. However, only when a gorilla's family is in danger from man, or when a male is wounded or savagely attacked, will the gorilla attack a native. At such times he shows much craftiness as well as great strength. Mr Guthrie relates:

"In one instance a band of gorillas was attacked by two Bulu men. The old gorilla of the band first got his family out of danger, and then returned to the encounter. He made a considerable detour behind the hunters in the endeavor to ambush them. Fortunately they heard him breaking through the bushes and thus avoided a most unpleasant meeting."

Again Mr Guthrie says:

"One native who is well known to me, shot a gorilla and was attacked immediately by another, which, fortunately for him, was a very old female that had lost most of her teeth. The man was therefore able to kill her with his knife, but not until she had mauled and torn him terribly. There is little doubt that had the attacking gorilla been a large able male, the man would have been killed."

The Bulu natives commonly believe that a wounded gorilla is rescued and carried away by its companions. And Mr Guthrie presents one "authentic instance" as grounds for such belief. A Bulu once shot a gorilla, and, thinking it dead, cut off a foot to take back to his village. On returning the next morning with companions, the natives discovered that the body was gone, but they followed a trail leading away for fully a mile, where they found the gorilla dead. The trail was stained with blood, and the marks along the trail plainly showed that the gorilla had been carried.

The native rates the gorilla as superior to most of the other forest animals of Kamerun, though he wins this distinction more because of his prowess as a fighter than because of his exceptional sagacity. However, he has a reputation for his usual ability to avoid traps, and his ability to free himself even from woven nets, when, very infrequently, he is caught in them. The chimpanzee is recognized as intellectually much superior to the gorilla.

## FOLK TALES OF THE GORILLA

The following folk-tales show how closely akin the Bulu believes himself and the gorilla, though the relationship is not considered more close than it is common for hunter folk to consider exists between themselves and dozens of other species of animals.

*The Gorilla and the Man*

"And it happened thus:—God bore children, a gorilla and a man. The man built himself a town and had much food, always; but the gorilla went to the forest and lived on 'bison' [a small red fruit]. After a time the bison was finished and the gorilla found nothing to eat. He said, 'I will go to my brother; he will give me food.' His wives and children said to him, 'Will you leave us?'

"He said, 'Come along, all of you.'

"So they went and came to the path [man's path], and there they found sugar cane growing in the gardens. So the children and the wives stopped there to eat the cane. The husband went on unmindful. He came to the town and sat down in the "palaver house."

"Then he said to the man, 'Oh, my brother, I was about to perish of hunger, therefore I came to you. You will give me food?'

"So the man told his children to go and break [gather] some sugar cane. The children went, but found that the gorillas were eating the cane. They therefore returned to the village and told the man that gorillas were eating and breaking down the cane. The man told them to call others, and go drive the gorillas away. So they went.

"The gorilla [in the palaver house] said to himself. 'Why, they have gone to kill mine.' So he told the man he must go for a walk, and making a detour he arrived at the garden. The man-children arrived, and the old gorilla shouted and scolded and drove them all away, and they ran back to the village. The gorilla went back and resumed his place in the palaver house. The children came running up, and the old man called out, 'What's all this?' They answered, 'A terrible old gorilla came out madly at us and drove us away; yes, and his face looked exactly like the face of that one over there in the corner!' The man said, 'Call a great many people and go back and drive them out.'

"They did so. The gorilla made another excuse and making a detour reached the garden. The man-children arrived. Then the old gorilla shouted at them, caught and bit some of them, and drove them all away. Then he went back to his seat in the palaver house.

"Soon the crowd of women and children came in [to the palaver house], and the man said, 'What happened?'

"'We went out there again,' they said, 'but one old gorilla attacked us and caught and bit some of us and drove us all away; and that old gorilla had a face just like the face of your guest over in the corner!'

"Then he [the man] took his gun and went out to the garden. The old gorilla went out by the same detour as before and came again to the garden. The man came. He saw the gorilla. He said, 'I can not endure that you harm my children.' So he shot the gorilla, and the gorilla died."

*The Child and the Gorilla*

"It happened thus:—A woman bore a child. She had no one with whom to leave the child, so she went to the gardens taking the child with her. When the child fell asleep she laid it on the ground and went on hoeing weeds. After a time a gorilla came along and picked up the child.

"The woman turned and seeing him, inquired, 'What are you doing with my child?'

"The gorilla replied, 'Do not fear; the thing that will kill the child will not come from the forest but from the town.'

"She asked, 'Why?'

"He replied, 'Because of you and me. I will not do it harm.'

"So the woman continued to hoe the garden, but she looked often at the child. When she had finished hoeing, she said, 'Now I must go to town.'

"The gorilla replied, 'Come and take your child.' And he went into the forest.

"The woman went to town. And this thing happened many times.

"Finally the woman told her husband. He said, 'And will the gorilla take the child of man?'

"So he asked the woman where the gorilla stayed, and she replied that he stayed beside the large stump of a tree.

"In the morning the husband took a spear and placed himself near the large stump. The woman went to hoe weeds. The gorilla again came from the forest, took up the child, and went to his usual place by the stump. And he [the man] threw his spear and the spear hit the child and the child died.

"Then the gorilla went to the forest, but first stopped in the garden and said to the woman, 'I told you that the thing which would kill the child would come from the town; I am going now.'

"Thus did the gorilla do."

## THE CHIMPANZEE

The Bulu tribe gives the chimpanzee credit for being the wisest of all animals. Many and strange are the Bulu stories of the cunning of this "man-like creature."

The chimpanzee of Kamerun lives in companies or bands, as does the gorilla, and, like the gorilla, he spends much of his time on the ground; but, unlike the gorilla, he spends his nights in the trees of his forest habitat. Just as the day is closing each chimpanzee makes for himself a leafy bed or nest, not unlike the large nest of a squirrel as seen in the early autumn on the leafy branches of our forest trees. At the first streak of a new day the nest is left, not to be occupied again, it is believed. The old males eventually become solitary, though the young on maturing are believed to remain in the kinship group.

The female gives birth to only one offspring at a time, and the child is picked up and carried cradled in its mother's arms against her body "just as we [the Bulu people] handle our babies." The chimpanzee child also cries and acts altogether like a spoiled human child when it can not have its own way. "These facts do more than all else to convince the Bulu that the chimpanzee is nearly half human. In fact some say that he seems to them more man than animal," says Mr Guthrie.

The immense forests furnish an abundance of varied food, so the chimpanzee usually experiences little trouble in satisfying its hunger. Sometimes he visits man's gardens for a change of diet, though less frequently than does the gorilla. Then he commonly seeks sugar cane which he eats with evident relish, and he also breaks it down with prodigal abandon. He sometimes takes a few bananas, and, less frequently, he takes plantain.

"Frequently he attempts to profit by the example of the garden's rightful owner," the Bulu says. At such times he breaks off many stalks of the cane, and then tears from its place of growth a woody vine and with it attempts to bind up the bundle of cane. "Commonly the twist he gives [binding the vine] fails to make a proper knot, or else he makes the mistake of tying the bundle of loose stalks up with a stalk still standing or with a sapling, and then it

can not be carried away. So he finally leaves with only one or two stalks which he chews and sucks as he leaves the garden."

The chimpanzee frequently gathers dead sticks and lays them together as though he would make a camp fire. As the natives say, "He makes up a camp fire, all except the fire." These piles of sticks are frequently seen in the forest.

These apes seem to have a real pleasure in color because "the chimpanzee sometimes takes the bright red or purple stem of a vine and wraps it about his wrist, and wears it like a bracelet."

If wounded while on the ground, a chimpanzee will often try to escape on the ground; but if wounded in a tree, he tries to escape through the branches of the trees. As he flees, if on the ground, "he gathers leaves or grass and plugs up any wounds he can get at. This is apparently to stop the flow of blood. Whether he selects any special kind of plant for this use, I have been unable to learn," says Mr Guthrie.

At play the chimpanzee is very imitative in a wild state, as well as in captivity. The *so* (*Cephalopus castaneus*), a small red antelope, has the habit of sleeping very soundly in the daytime, and one sometimes comes right up to it, in its sleep, before it dashes off. The belief is common among the Bulu that the chimpanzees catch these sleeping small antelopes and carry them up into the trees to play with. Mr Guthrie says, "One man only have I found willing to say he had seen such a case, and in that instance he said the *so* was shot while in the possession of a chimpanzee."

By day and night the chimpanzee seems always to have something to say, and one even when alone frequently makes noise enough for half a dozen animals.

"Sometimes when hunted the chimpanzee exhibits strange, almost human, emotions. When, for instance, he is found in a tree which by reason of its isolated position offers no chance of getting away except by coming down where the hunter is, the animal almost wrings his hands at the hunter and waves his arms about in an apparent appeal to the hunter's fraternity or humanity, not to shoot him. Sometimes this attitude is very pathetic, and I have heard black men say they doubt whether they could shoot a

chimpanzee because the animal appears so very human. Some, in fact, do refuse to eat the flesh of the chimpanzee because of this same reason. This means much more than those unacquainted with the Bulu people can readily realize, because the Bulu eats all flesh obtainable, from caterpillars to elephant hide.

The Bulu has many folk tales of the chimpanzee as well as of all his animal acquaintances. One version of a creation tale is here presented. Its variants are wide spread among other tribes of the Bantu people. The story is of the five most intelligent animals the Bulu knows, including, of course, the chimpanzee.

### *The Story of Creation*

"God bore children named as follows: gorilla, chimpanzee, elephant, dwarf, and man. Then he decided to send them out, each by himself, to settle where they chose. They were given fire, seed, tools, etc. So they went out.

"The gorilla went first, and as he passed along he saw some 'bison,' so he turned aside to eat. When he returned the fire he had put down was dead, so he went back into the 'bush.'

"Then the chimpanzee started out. After going a little way he also became hungry and seeing fruit in a tall tree climbed up after it, first leaving his fire carefully at the tree's base. After eating his fill, he returned only to find the fire quite dead. So he too returned to life in the forest.

"The elephant went next, and like the others turned aside to satisfy his appetite, and his fire died out.

"Following him went the dwarf, who went out much farther and finally cleared away some of the underbrush and planted his seed and also built himself a small hut. He did not cut down the large trees, but he kept his fire going and he learned the ways of the forest.

"Then at last man started out and traveled very far indeed. Finally, choosing a location very carefully, he built himself a large good house, cleared a place for a large garden, even cutting down the tall trees. Then he burned the space and planted the garden; after long waiting the harvest came.

"After a time, God started out to see how his children were getting on. Thus he found that the gorilla, chimpanzee, and elephant were living in the forest from the fruit of the forest, even as they had chosen. 'So,' said God, 'you can never again bear [stand before] man, but must ever flee from him.'

"Then God went on and found the dwarf under the trees in the forest. 'So,' said God, 'you will always live thus, in the forest, but no place will be your fixed abode.'

"Then God came to man and found him living in a good house and in possession of and enjoying the fruits of his large gardens. So he told man that his estate and possession would also remain as it was, unchanged."

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